

THE REPERTOIRE OF JOHN McCORMACK

INTRODUCTION

By Paul Worth

*“Irish poets, learn your trade,
Sing whatever is well made ...”*
- W. B. Yeats

This alphabetical listing has been compiled to present the full scope of John McCormack's repertoire over the full length of his active career, and to demonstrate in objective detail what aficionados of his art have often asserted: that his repertoire, as performed in concert and recital, was vast and consisted overwhelmingly of art song, lieder, arias, and the songs of serious composers of his day, and that much of his recorded repertoire is not representative of the quality and variety of songs that he consistently presented on the stage. This index thus serves as a guide to both recorded and unrecorded repertoire.

One could strictly argue that, in the following index, McCormack's actual repertoire consisted of the selections that he sang in live performance, and those which he regarded as being in his repertoire, even if seldom performed, but for purposes of this index McCormack's repertoire has been conceptualized broadly and compiled from a variety of sources.

As such the sources of this listing include the following:

The songs and arias that comprised his repertoire were first and foremost those that he sang in live performance. (The vast majority of these selections have been culled from a large sample of leaflets, brochures, and booklets that were distributed at his performances and from reviews—which in times past often included mention of all or most of the selections on the program, as well as some of the encores.)

Recordings are listed, and this serves as an alphabetical guide. Listings indicate which items in his active repertoire were also recorded, as well as the great many that were not.

Another component of his repertoire, certainly, were his 21 opera roles, performed between 1906 and 1923. In his early concert and recitals McCormack often included arias from the operas that he performed on stage, as well as other arias from those he did not.

In the latter half of his career McCormack made many radio broadcasts. The selections performed are also included in the listings. In some seasons, one sees that the broadcast selections match those presented on stage in the same season. In other seasons, such as 1933-34 and 1934-35, the broadcasts virtually took the place of stage appearances, and McCormack presented a remarkable number and variety of selections on the air.

Evidence from published sheet music is also included. Many songs were touted as “Sung by John McCormack,” while others were advertised as dedicated to him, written for him, or “successfully introduced” by him. The Index makes clear, where known, the songs which McCormack performed in recital or recorded, and those which he did not. Sheet music publishers are noted for as many

songs as the editor has been able to discover. The sheet music for many songs was reissued more than once, and where this is the case, the earliest date and the original (or earliest) publisher is shown.

The list is amplified by the inclusion of selections which McCormack *regarded* as being in his repertoire, even if he did not perform them often. This evidence stems from the contents of the Schneider Repertoire Book and one of his Little Black Books (discussed below).

Some readers will doubtless have varying opinions about which selections should be regarded as being “in” McCormack’s repertoire, and that is to be expected. Nevertheless, McCormack never performed a song or aria in public without extensive practice and preparation, as numerous sources attest, so even if a given selection was performed (or recorded) only once or a relatively few times, it was “in” at that time.

The Structure of McCormack’s recitals: Groups and Encores

For most of his career, McCormack constructed his recital appearances according to a set formula of four groups of selections that were separated by either the performances by an assisting artist or an intermission. The programs were carefully assembled, and each group of scheduled songs or arias usually included only the finest examples of songs in particular genres. All four categories/groups received the same care and attention. No item that was listed or scheduled in advance was treated as a throwaway. From season to season he always sought and added new material that he regarded as worthy. In live performance McCormack always sought to fulfill what he regarded as his obligations as an artist and to the legacy of the predecessors that he admired. His goal was to satisfy his own standards while attending to the highest standards that others (critics as well as other singers) might impose.

He described his formula for a recital in this way:

“I build my programme in a set way ... and never vary from it. The formula is this:

First, I give my audience the songs that I love.

Second, I give them songs they ought to like, and will like when they hear them often enough.

Third, I give them the folksongs of my native land, which I hold to be the most beautiful of any music of this kind—this is song propaganda.

Fourth, I give my audiences songs they want to hear, for such songs they have every right to expect.” (Key, 381)

In practice this pattern took the following form: Group I contained two or three Handel, Bach, or other pre-19th century arias or songs. After an interlude by an assisting artist, typically a violinist or other string player, Group II contained four lieder or art songs. A short intermission was followed by Group III, which was comprised of four Irish songs and ballads. Another interlude by the assisting artist followed. Group IV contained four songs by contemporary composers, for the most part, but McCormack often included a religious number amongst the four scheduled selections, and, in the early years, selected arias (although the latter had disappeared for the most part by about 1920. Thus, for a typical recital the scheduled selections numbered 14 (until about 1933).

The first season in which this Four Group pattern was used 1912-13. During the seven seasons in the UK and Ireland that preceded McCormack’s American career, he typically appeared in concert

with other singers and musicians, and this pattern continued in the US during the two seasons from the fall of 1910 to the spring of 1912. Beginning with his spring 1912 US tour, McCormack began the four group pattern and seldom diverged from it for the remainder of his career. Here is a typical program, presented in Dallas on 8 December 1916:

- I. Recitative and aria from *Sosarme* (Handel): Rend'il sereno al cigillo
 - II. The Poor Irish Lad (Handel)
Faded Flowers (Schubert) (English translation of Trockne Blumen)
May Night (Brahms)
When Night Descends (Rachmaninoff)
 - III. Norah O'Neale (arr. Hughes)
A Ballynure Ballad (arr. Hughes)
Kathleen O'More (arr. Hughes)
Pastheen Fionn (arr. Milligan Fox)
 - IV. The Bitterness of Love (Dunn)
Your Eyes (Schneider)
Deep River (arr. Burleigh)
Her Portrait (Melvin)
- Edwin Schneider, piano accompaniment
Donald McBeath, violin, Assisting Artist (interludes after groups I, II, and III)

Assignments to a particular group were usually consistent from season to season, but one occasionally notes that a song migrated from Group II to Group IV, or from Group II to Group I. Likewise, there were a few Irish songs which McCormack included in Group IV. These variations are indicated in the listings for the index.

McCormack gave encores in two ways. First he typically offered two or more encores after the scheduled selections in each group. These were of the same genre as the listed selections and were drawn from the pool of selections of that genre that he had prepared for a given season. Since he usually prepared a great many selections for each group for a season, as discussed below, these encore offerings had the effect of extending the contents of a group to six or seven selections.

There was usually a second set of encores presented at the end of a recital, when McCormack presented, to the delight of his audiences (if not all critics), what amounted to a fifth group of his most popular signature songs, such as "Mother Machree," "I Hear You Calling Me," and others, as well as popular favorites, such as "Love's old Sweet Song."

This last portion of a stage appearance was always wildly popular, and was what many attendees had looked forward to. Some critics disdained these numbers, but the audience at large generally loved them. Most serious singers of the day presented less serious selections in public and on records. It was a common practice and did not detract from their status as serious artists. Yet it was a criticism sometimes leveled at McCormack by some critics that he lowered himself by lavishing his artistic ability on "rubbish" (a criticism made perhaps more often by British critics than by those in the US), and sometimes echoed by latter day critics who know only the recorded legacy.

When people today deride McCormack's singing of popular material, however, they are expressing one or more of several mistakes or canards: Chiefly they are mistaking his recital repertoire for his

recorded repertoire. But they are also disdaining the taste of a previous era by scorning his singing as encores the songs or ballads of the day that were popular then, and by no means unworthy, yet very different to modern ears. They do not understand the importance that the text had for McCormack's artistic expressiveness, which was the reason that he preferred to perform songs rather than arias. Critics often, through ignorance or chauvinism, equated the high-quality arrangements of genuine Irish folk songs that McCormack sang as his Group III repertoire with the far more numerous composed songs with an Irish theme that were written and sold as sheet music during the century preceding the end of McCormack's career.

The 4-group pattern was steady for McCormack's tours from 1912 through the spring of 1929. The 1929-30 season was a break-point in McCormack's career. There was no tour, due to the making of *Song o' My Heart*, and he never again established the rhythm of his previous years. His tours became less intense, and he concentrated more on the UK. The number of selections per group was reduced generally from four to three.

Although McCormack commonly performed operatic arias in concerts and recitals early in his career, he gradually reduced this practice during the first years of his American career. The season of 1916-17 was the last in which 19th-20th century operatic arias are programmed for Group I, other than "Il mio tesoro." Several still appeared as individual selections in Group IV as late as May 1926, such as "E lucevan le stelle."

Extent of Repertoire for a given Season:

During his heyday the size of McCormack's performing repertoire for a single season was impressive. Even during his early years (1903-1912) on the concert and recital stage he typically prepared two dozen or more songs and arias for presentation. For two seasons before coming to the US (1907-08 and 1908-09) the total was closer to four dozen. After he hit his stride on the American circuits (coinciding with his years under the management of Charles Wagner) the total number of selections presented during a single season averaged about 84 (ranging from 65 in 1914-15 to 98 in 1919-1920), between 1912 and 1922. When McCormack resumed his US tours after his illness in the spring of 1922, the number of selections presented per season dropped somewhat but still averaged about 67 (through the spring of 1929). McCormack made few appearances during the 1929-30 season due to the making of *Song o' My Heart*. When he resumed touring in the fall of 1930, the number of selections presented that and subsequent seasons was again slightly reduced, averaging about 43 per season through 1937. The exception to this pattern was 1933-35 when he concentrated on radio broadcasts and gave few recitals. During those two seasons he performed an amazing number of selections on the air: 164 in 1933-34 and 102 in the fall of 1934. Resuming recitals in the spring of 1935, he presented far fewer selections. For his farewell tour of Great Britain and Ireland in the fall of 1938 McCormack presented a total of only about 2 dozen selections.

The distribution of prepared selections over the four groups was fairly constant after 1912. For a given season McCormack typically presented between 12 to 18 different selections for Group I and about 2 dozen for each of Groups II through IV. These figures fell proportionately after 1930, in line with the totals presented each season. (For example, for the 1931-32 season the totals were: Group I, 8; Group II, 19; Group III, 13; and Group IV, 16.)

Recordings:

McCormack's discography contains many selections that he performed in recital and concert throughout his career, but there are many others which he did not, and which are in fact unrepresentative of his artistic focus in recital.

Perusing the extensive list of songs that he performed over the years, one is struck by the dichotomy that is apparent between two general categories:

What he performed in recital and concert during a season or succession of seasons
What he sang "only for the record."

McCormack regarded his recital performances as his serious artistic endeavor. On the stage he had control of what he sang and could present what he chose. Records were a sideline, not completely under his control. Making and selling records was a way to make more money and to capitalize (literally) on his celebrity.

He clearly did not regard the recording studio as a venue to mirror his public artistic activity or to preserve only his best work as an artist for the ages. He must have realized that economic considerations and the eclectic tastes of the record-buying public would preclude his recording much of what he sang in public. The Victor Company certainly did, and the evidence suggests that their emphasis was on what was likely to sell in large numbers—pop songs and ballads more so than lieder and art songs.

In any event McCormack's repertoire was far too large for there to be any possibility of Victor recording it all. Nevertheless, considering his cumulative number of recordings for both Odeon and Victor/HMV season by season at any point in his career, one finds that McCormack had recorded (for either company, up to that point) about one third of the selections that he presented on stage in any given season. In some years the percentage rises to almost 50%, as in 1917-18 when out of a total number of 89 selections presented that season, McCormack had made recordings of 42. On the average the percentage rises markedly after 1926 when it typically was 60% or higher. Considering the probable conflict between Victor's priorities for popular (i.e., saleable) material and McCormack's inclination toward more serious selections, aficionados today should probably be glad that we have as much serious repertoire on record as we do, rather than lamenting its paucity. One indication that seems to support this interpretation seems to be the relatively high percentage of lieder and art song that McCormack recorded in the studios of the Gramophone Co. after 1923, in comparison of the published recordings by Victor during the last few years of McCormack's activity in their studios. The more serious repertoire items seem to have appealed to a higher percentage of the record-buying public in the UK and Europe than in the US.

McCormack's recordings of Irish songs have always been among his most admired and popular recordings to listeners who have come to know his art during the more than 50 years since his death. As popular as they were with the record-buying public, however, even McCormack's list of Irish song recordings is surprisingly limited in comparison with the number of Irish songs that he sang in recital over the years, which totaled about 200 across his entire career (1903-1943). Of these McCormack recorded about 95, counting the few unpublished items.

One should bear in mind that McCormack's activities in the recording studio took place only in the US studios of Victor from 1910-1924, during which time a great many recordings were produced and sold that critics then and now have scoffed at. These records were sold in England by the

Gramophone Company, and apparently sold well. McCormack was not heard in live performance in England between 1914 and 1924, although most of his recordings for the Victor Co., made in the US, were issued in England by the Gramophone Co. Consequently the impressions of the listening public in the British Isles were formed by consideration of his recorded repertoire rather than by the songs and arias that McCormack performed in recitals and concerts in the US. Thus, critics and reviewers in the UK inevitably developed a skewed and inaccurate view of his repertoire and failed to understand the dichotomy between the selections that he sang in performance and those that he recorded. Many critics thus wrote overly harsh and inaccurate assessments of what they supposed was McCormack's neglect of serious music in favor of "rubbish."

The making of many records represented almost a parallel career, a pursuit in many ways set apart from his performing practices as a singer on the recital stage. There were clearly many songs that McCormack recorded because they were popular and deemed likely to sell well, but which he never sang in public performance. In some cases the endorsements on sheet music covers referred to such Victor records. In many cases the publication dates of the sheet music and the recording dates of the corresponding Victor records suggest a coordinated effort by publisher and record company or at least that the latter was arranging for McCormack to sing current hits, in some cases "covering" a hit by another artist (e.g., "Sonny Boy").

McCormack must have regarded his activities as an artist on the stage as generally occurring in a realm apart from those in the recording studio and as to some extent apart from and by no means representative of his abilities as an artist. One well known example of his unwillingness to sing certain popular songs in recital was his response to a request to sing "It's a Long Way to Tipperary" at a recital. McCormack reportedly declined, saying that it was a song that he sang "only for the record."

Taste and Preference in Lyrics:

McCormack usually sought the best marriage of text and music for the songs that he programmed for live performances. This being so, he often gravitated to or selected songs that are based on poetry. His style and essence as an artist was to render a beautiful expression for his listeners of the latent emotions of a poem through the medium of music.

McCormack is regarded by many as one of the few singers who could do justice to the combination of poetry and music, a difficult task for the composer, but harder still for the singer to bring to life in performance. Many connoisseurs have doubted the wisdom of even making the attempt, as W.H. Auden has noted:

There are two extreme schools of thought which disapprove of setting verses with real poetic merit to music. There are lovers of poetry who hold that not only can nothing be added to a good poem by music but also something must be lost, that music, by distorting the rhythms and tempi of the spoken word, is bound to ruin it. There are lovers of singing, on the other hand, (few of them, I suspect, are actually composers) who hold that all a composer requires are so-and-so-many syllables of such-and-such a quality, that their verbal meaning is irrelevant and that good poetry is too intractable, too insubordinate, to be settable.

McCormack clearly did not adhere to either extreme. He actively sought out good poetry and if he liked the poetry he chose those songs by composers who could choose and set a poem which, in Auden's words, "expresses either a single state of feeling or an obvious contrast of states and a

diction centered round the dynamic elements of language, interjections, imperatives, verbs of motion, etc.” Auden’s discussion centers on poems and songs of the Elizabethan period at a time when it was generally believed that some poems were “suitable” and others not. McCormack examined many and chose the few that met his exacting standards.

The sheer variety of art songs with lyrics by poets that he performed is impressive and only partially to be appreciated from the selections that he recorded. Other poets whose lyrics were set to music that McCormack performed over the years (that he did record) included:

Matthew Arnold
Robert Browning
Arlo Bates
Charles Baudelaire
Mary Coleridge
Padraic Colum
Pierre Corneille
Emily Dickinson
Ralph Waldo Emerson
Richard Le Gallienne
Alfred Perceval Graves
Cahir Healy
Robert Herrick
Victor Hugo

James Weldon Johnson
Francis Ledwidge
Henry W. Longfellow
Philip Bourke Marston
Alice Meynell
Sarojini Naidu
Moirá O’Neill
Dante G. Rossetti
Percy Bysshe Shelley
A.C. Swinburne
Rabindranath Tagore
Alfred Tennyson
Walt Whitman
William Butler Yeats

McCormack was not a snob: he was open to the best efforts of contemporary composers and ignored the chauvinism of critics whose personal definition of *lieder* or art song was more restricted. Late advertisements for McCormack’s appearances bill him as ‘the World’s Greatest Singer of Songs.’ He clearly was a connoisseur of solo works for voice and wanted to present the best work by contemporary composers who wrote songs. Early in his American career McCormack stated in interviews that he performed German *lieder* in English translation because he thought his listeners should be able to understand the message of the text directly from his singing, but after 1923 he regularly performed the songs of Schubert, Wolf, and other composers in German

McCormack adopted, of necessity, at the beginning of his career the criteria and conventions that were regarded as the benchmarks of great singing, and he performed within two of the vocal arenas that constituted the pinnacle of vocalism in England at that time, opera and the concert stage. Oratorio singing, though popular with Victorian and Edwardian audiences, was evidently not to his liking to the same degree, and McCormack engaged in this genre only sparingly.

Although he certainly succeeded in opera, by the standards of the time, as his career progressed McCormack realized that being part of a collective effort was less his preference and strength than being in complete control of his artistic effort. Furthermore he liked song and the expressiveness that he could bring to its performance in ways that a singing style that emphasized mainly the musical line at the expense of the text could not (or often failed to) achieve. Shaped by the vocal milieu of his time, in which there was not the latter-day distinction between serious and popular music, McCormack gravitated to song as a genre, in which his talents could all be brought to bear on each selection. Artistic unity of text, music, timbre, and other aspects of storytelling and emotional expression could be optimized, all the more so because he could choose the songs.

Choices of Songs:

Modern listeners are often perplexed or bemused by the songs that McCormack recorded in his early years, finding them quaint or stilted and at odds with modern taste. But examination of the repertoire of his famous contemporaries makes it clear that McCormack was usually following their lead. It seems clear that McCormack chose his repertoire in large part within the tradition of English singers who were known as exponents of oratorio, lieder, and art song, such as Sims Reeves, Charles Santley, Edward Lloyd, H. Plunkett Greene, and others. McCormack's singing of songs associated with these other famous singers was in a sense merely the practice that was later termed "covering." A perusal of the songs and arias strongly associated with a few other famous singers of the day makes it clear that McCormack's choice of repertoire often derived from the successes of other singers:

For example, the following selections, all performed and recorded by McCormack, were associated with the repertoire of Sims Reeves in the public mind:

- Bay of Biscay
- Come into the Garden Maude
- Good Night Good Night Beloved
- I'll sing Thee Songs of Araby
- My Queen
- Oft in the Silly Night
- Once Again
- Then you'll Remember Me

H. Plunkett Greene's repertoire contained the following, all later performed by McCormack:

- Bois Epais
- Maire My Girl
- Molly Brannigan
- Off to Philadelphia
- Trottin' to the Fair

The following selections were strongly associated with the repertoire of Charles Santley:

- Colleen Bawn
- The Moon hath raised her Lamp Above
- My Queen
- The Rosary
- Trottin' to the Fair

Ivor Foster often performed the following:

- In an Old fashioned Town
- Kashimiri song
- The Moon has raised her Lamp Above
- Thora
- The Trumpeter
- Until

The following selections were strongly associated with the repertoire of Ben Davies:

- Drink to me Only
- I'll Sing Thee Songs of Araby
- In a Persian Garden
- Mother o' Mine
- Nirvana
- My Dreams
- Star of Bethlehem

David Bispham:

Drink to me Only with Thine Eyes
In a Persian Garden
Kathleen Mavourneen

Edward Lloyd:

The Holy City
I'll Sing Thee Songs of Araby
The Last Watch
Nirvana
Star of Bethlehem
Then you'll remember me

Many of McCormack's Italian songs were performed by his contemporaries early in his career, and he probably took a cue from their success in selecting some of them. The most notable instance in this genre, perhaps, is "Mattinata," composed for Caruso and recorded by him, which McCormack included in his concert repertoire from 1905-08 and recorded twice (Odeon: 1908, Victor: 1913).

It is also revealing to note the years in which various songs were published or first became popular. A partial list of songs that McCormack performed or recorded, which were popular well before the start of the twentieth century included the following:

1700	Annie Laurie	1862	The Moon has raised her Lamp Above
1740	the Lass with the Delicate Air	1866	Come Back to Erin
1777	Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes	1866	When you and I were Young, Maggie
1805	Bay of Biscay	1869	Sweet Genevieve
1806	Dear Little Shamrock	1873	Silver Threads among the Gold
1807	Believe Me ...	1877	I'll Sing Thee Songs of Araby
	The Harp that Once ...		The Lost Chord
	The Minstrel Boy	1879	The Kerry Dance
	She is Far from the Land	1880	Goodbye (Tosti)
	Last Rose of Summer	1882	In Dublin's fair City
1815	Oft in the Stilly Night	1887	The Star of Bethlehem
1824	Cherry Ripe	1889	Off to Philadelphia
1836	Kathleen Mavourneen	1892	The Holy City
1848	Ben Bolt	1896	In a Persian Garden
1850	Rose of Tralee	1897	Say Au Revoir but not Goodbye
1856	Come into the Garden Maude		She is Far from the Land
1861	Killarney		

The dates of the above titles are also interesting in light of McCormack's championing of the works of so many composers of songs who were active after the turn of the century.

Special Groups:

Within the four group structure of his recitals McCormack often crafted Groups II and IV to present sets of songs that he particularly favored.

An early example of this practice was his presentation as Group II of “Four Modern Irish Songs” by Hamilton Harty (2-5-11) during the 1912-13 season (2-22-13 and 3-2-13). A similar set of Harty songs was presented on 5-26-18 and again on 12-3-31 (as Group IV).

McCormack adjusted his group II selections for his European performances in the spring of 1923:

4-26-23, Prague	all Rachmaninoff songs
5-2-23, Berlin	all Schubert songs
5-8-23, Paris	all French art songs

McCormack was very partial to the lieder of Hugo Wolf, and there are a number of instances when Group II consisted solely of songs by this composer (e.g., 12-9-23, 12-3-310). McCormack also presented a group of Wolf songs with orchestral accompaniment at concerts on several occasions (e.g., 12-21-26).

Examples of his tweaking of the contents of a particular group abound. The following illustrate this practice: A somewhat different approach is represented by a Group II presented in England in the summer of 1932 when McCormack sang four songs with lyrics by Shakespeare (7-17-32). Even Group III was not immune to occasional variations, such as the recital on 1-5-20 when Group III was entitled “Songs of Four British Nations.” It was rare, though, for McCormack to depart from his usual Group I repertoire, and there are few instances known of his doing so. One of these is a group of four songs by Edward McDowell performed as Group I on 2-22-17.

In many seasons McCormack seemed to pursue certain genres or themes in his selections for songs for certain groups. For example, Russian songs by 5 composers appear in group II during the 1920-21 season. Many seasons saw the repeated inclusion of works by particularly favored composers, such as Rachmaninoff, Henry Thacker Burleigh, Samuel Coleridge Taylor, Frank Bridge, and others. Other names of twentieth century composers also appear amongst his scheduled selections, such as Tchernin, Respighi, and Blechman.

McCormack also often included a song by his accompanist, Edwin Schneider, among his Group IV selections. During the 1920-21 season McCormack sang no less than six different titles by Schneider, three of which he recorded. Altogether McCormack is known to have performed eleven songs by Schneider in recital during their years together.

When the Dew Is Falling
Your Eyes
Only You
Far Apart
The Cave
Flower Rain

In the Treetops High
Thine Eyes Still Shined
One Gave Me a Rose
Sunrise Wakes the Lark to Sing
Unmindful of the Roses.

McCormack made recordings for Victor of the first four titles in Column 1. Schneider made numerous arrangements of songs for McCormack as well.

Schneider composed a number of other songs, including:

Within the Stillness of the Woods

Black-Eyed Susan

Silent Years
Snow Flowers

Song of the Twilight
A Wreath of Roses

McCormack often revived songs that were particular favorites (of his) after an interval of many years and included them in recitals after a long absence. Examples of these include “Molly Bawn,” “Little Boy Blue,” “Drink to me Only with Thine Eyes,” “Molly Brannigan,” “When Other Lips” (from *The Bohemian Girl*), and “Eileen Allanah.” Even his signature song “I Hear You Calling Me” was seldom performed after 1920 until McCormack revived it during the 1933-34 season.

Late Recordings:

In later years when McCormack was not touring as much he made recordings of selections that he once might have programmed in Group I, such as the Mozart aria, “Ridente la calma.” The same might be said of songs by latter-day composers that once might have appeared in Group IV. There are a number of these among the final HMV recordings. There are also many selections that might otherwise have been included in Group II: English art songs such as those by Vaughn Williams, Somervell, Bax, and Bantock. Perhaps he was taking advantage of HMV’s willingness to record such selections, even when it was not feasible to present them in recital.

* * *

McCormack never wavered in his determination to present SONGS that he deemed worthy examples of vocal art, even if he purposefully strayed at times, on HIS whim, into less lofty or sentimental repertoire. This Index of his Repertoire will reward scrutiny by those who are familiar with his recordings, and come as a revelation to a host of McCormack’s admirers who are unfamiliar with his performing practices, now to be appreciated only from archival information, a preliminary survey of which is offered by these listings.

Layout of the Repertoire Index

Title line:

The lyricist or poet is given first, along with information about the sources of the verses, followed (after the slash) by the composer or arranger, with related information, such as the opus numbers and the names of larger musical works, such as song cycles. Publisher and copyright date are noted where known. The earliest copyright date found by the editor is given.

The language in which a selection was performed is denoted by a letter in parentheses at the end of the line: (I) Italian, (G) German, (F) French, (L) Latin. All other selections were performed in English.

German Lieder are listed by title in German. Songs in Italian and French are listed by title in those languages. Where McCormack sang a song in translation, this is noted and cross-indexed. Other Art songs are listed by the English title, and the original title is shown in parentheses if known.

Opera: Complete operas that McCormack performed on stage are shown in a box. Individual arias that were performed in recital or concert are listed separately. Operas are listed in the language in which each was originally written. Arias are listed in the language in which McCormack sang them.

Given their prominent place in his repertoire, Irish songs or songs by Irish composers are noted with a “shamrock” symbol (♣).

Below this information there are five columns containing the following information:

Column 1:

The first column lists the seasons in which McCormack performed a selection in recital or concert. The “season” is regarded as beginning in September and running through the following May. Summer performances are regarded as being part of the preceding season. Seasons are here defined as September 1 through the following August 31. Thus 1915-16 means that a selection was performed by McCormack during the concert season spanning September 1915 through August 1917. The first year always refers to the interval before Christmas; the second year always to that part of the season after Christmas. Thus, 1913-16 means that McCormack performed a selection for three seasons: 1913-14, 1914-15, and 1915-16.

Beginning with the 1912-13 season the Group in which a scheduled selection was included is indicated by Roman numerals (etc.) in parentheses following the season.

Examples:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| III | Sung as a scheduled selection in Group III |
| IIIe | Sung as an encore after Group III |
| III, e | means sung as a scheduled selection in Group III and also used as an encore |
| 1913-14 (?) | The selection can be documented as having been performed, but it is uncertain which Group it was in. |
| 1913-14? | It is uncertain if this song was performed during the season given, but some evidence suggests that it was. |
| 1913-14 (III?) | a selection is documented as having been performed and it is probable, although not certain, that it was included in the Group shown. |
| (O) | McCormack performed this selection in a concert with Orchestra, thus there was no “Group.” An example is “Beherzigung,” performed with orchestra on 12-21-26. |
| (-) | McCormack appearance where selection was not part of a group or an encore because he was one artist among others at a larger concert, such as a benefit, or because he did not sing in all “groups” presented, such as during his Red Cross Tour in 1939-40. |

The year 1929 marks a hiatus of sorts in McCormack’s career. He did not begin a tour in the fall. After spending May through September in Ireland, he and his family returned to the US in October to begin preparations for filming *Song o’ My Heart*. While in Ireland he gave one known recital (in Dublin on 9-28-29), which is perhaps best regarded as his concluding performance for the 1928-29 season, and that is how the known selections are listed. After the premiere of *Song o’ My Heart* (3-11-30) he and his family sailed to Ireland, and McCormack did not give any recitals until the fall of 1930 in England and Ireland. Thus, there are no entries for a 1929-30 season. The selections that McCormack performed in *Song o’ My Heart* were virtually all numbers that had been featured in the several seasons preceding the movie.

1908-09 was McCormack's last season exclusively in the UK and Ireland until 1939-40. He sang only 3 groups per recital on the 1939-40 Red Cross Tour.

McCormack sometimes grouped selections differently from season to season, and sometimes within the same season, as indicated by Roman numerals.

Repertoire items noted for 1940-42 are relatively sparse. There are not many programs to go by, and McCormack was often not the only artist billed. Thus a Group assignment is not noted.

Sampling Error:

This index is based on a comparatively extensive accumulation of programs, reviews, advertisements, and other data, but it is important to remember that it is a sample, albeit large, and thus incomplete. McCormack gave too many recitals and concerts over the four decades of his career for a researcher to aspire to collect a complete set of data!

footnote:

(This editor's accumulation of programs, reviews, and other data relating to McCormack's repertoire has been deposited at The Irish Music Center of the Burns Library at Boston College, in original or facsimile form, for the benefit of future researchers.)

For many seasons the examination of 10-18 programs and newspaper reviews yields a sense that one has captured virtually all selections performed during that season. Newspaper reviews, in the US especially before WWII, often listed the complete recital program as part of the review, and the reviewer or critic often noted encores as well.

For a given season McCormack usually prepared three or four times as many selections for a given Group than were scheduled for a typical recital. In some seasons the number for each group was higher to accommodate the repeated appearances in NYC and Boston. Successive recitals thus had different listings in the programs for each group, and, since he gave encores after each Group, McCormack could use a selection that he might have scheduled at a previous recital.

The researcher focusing on a single season usually gets a sense of when he has gathered all or most of the possibilities for each Group in a season. This method works well, but since one never gets to examine all the programs for a season or reviews for all the recitals, it is certainly possible that some selections have escaped notice. The purpose here is primarily to document McCormack's repertoire over the years, however, rather than to attempt a complete listing, appearance by appearance.

McCormack performed many songs and arias for many seasons in succession, based on information derived from the large sample of recital programs and reviews examined by the editor, however, for some items a lengthy run of such successive seasons appears to be broken by that selection's absence from the recitals of a single season. This may be due to sampling error, rather than to McCormack's omission of that selection from a single season's repertoire from a long sequence of seasons that included the selection in its usual place.

Column 2: Recordings

These are denoted by matrix and take numbers and by the date of recording for discs and by issue numbers for cylinders. Odeon matrix numbers have the prefixes L, Lx, and Lxx. All other matrix numbers are either Victor or HMV, as listed in the chart in the introduction to the Discography in this volume. An effort has been made to line up the dates of recordings with the dates of seasons, but this was not always possible.

It is instructive to examine the entries which only have an entry on column II and perhaps an entry in Column 4, especially in light of critical remarks over the years that refer to McCormack's repertoire as consisting largely of "rubbish" or other material that a critic deems unworthy of him.

Column 3: Broadcasts and Films

Broadcasts are listed with the prefixes "US:" and "UK:" (denoting country of origin) followed by the date. Recordings made as part of films are listed with the prefix 'F:' followed by an abbreviation of the title of the film in which McCormack performed (F: SOMH - *Song o' My Heart*; F: WotM - *Wings of the Morning*; F: NFF - Newsreel Film footage). Entries are given for all known broadcast selections, although it should be noted that few of these survive as line-checks or air-checks.

Column 4: Sheet Music

McCormack's name appears on many pieces of sheet music, usually with the note that it was sung by him. In a few cases the cover notes that the song is dedicated to him, or "successfully introduced" by him, or perhaps recorded by him. A relative few pieces have his picture on the cover. Deciding if such evidence means that a given selection was "in" his repertoire requires scrutiny of the other entries for that selection. If there are entries in columns 1, 3, or 5, that would constitute an indication that the song was actively in his repertoire or so regarded by McCormack. A second entry only in column 2 (recordings) suggests that although the song was recorded, it was probably not a regular repertoire item, no matter how popular the record might have been. Sheet music from major publishers which included the note "Sung by John McCormack" on the cover probably did so with the approval of the tenor. In some cases there is documentation that McCormack sang the piece in recital, while for many such items there is not. In some few cases the editor has stumbled at long last over a recital program that includes the only known inclusion of a song which is so designated on the cover, but there are many for which such evidence is lacking. Obsessive aficionados will doubtless be attentive to such lacunae.

The following abbreviations are used to indicate the various ways that McCormack is noted on sheet music. (Boosey is used just as an example.) When more than one of these codes are applicable, they are separated by a space.

Boosey sb	Sung by John McCormack
Boosey r	recorded by
Boosey p	Picture of McCormack on cover
Boosey a	Connection with McCormack noted in advertisement, often at the back of other sheet music
Boosey d	Dedicated to McCormack
Boosey i	Introduced by John McCormack
Boosey af	arranged for John McCormack

Songs written for or dedicated to John McCormack, but not so indicated on known sheet music, are noted in the title lines above the columns.

As mentioned above, there is a large collection of McCormack's own sheet music at Boston College that is part of *The Fred Manning collection of John McCormack*. This accumulation was left with McCormack's brother Jim when the McCormacks moved back to England in the late 1930's. This index does not reflect the complete collection, but where an item is included it is designated "MC-BC" (Manning Collection {Irish Music Center, Burns Library}, Boston College). Some of the sheet music in the Manning Collection may not have been John's, but most of it was. Manning acquired the cabinet and music from the widow of James McCormack. Many items are stamped "James McCormack;" a few are signed "James McCormack" or "Jim's," but most are clearly John's.

Of course, McCormack was sent songs by composers and publishers that he may have saved but never sung.

Column 5: Other Documentation of Repertoire

Other documentation includes entries in McCormack's "Little Black Book." These pages containing the lyrics to songs were contained in a small black ring binder about 4 inches by 7 seven inches. The pages were either typed or written out by hand. Those latter in the book in the Manning Collection at the Burns Library, Boston College are mostly in Edwin Schneider's handwriting. This was one of two known books, and is designated "BB1." The second book was given (by Lily McCormack) to Sydney MacEwan, who eventually gave it to a prominent McCormack collector in the UK, and was not available to the editor.

A second important source of selections that McCormack regarded as being in his active repertoire is a notebook that for present purposes I have deemed the "Schneider Repertoire Book," abbreviated "SRB." This dates from the early to mid 1930s, probably predating 1936 (since "The Star of County Down" is not in it). It is written in a very formal and organized form in Schneider's handwriting (except for the first page of entries, which is McCormack's). The title page shows the following: "John McCormack's Repertory of /Classic Airs & Songs/German Songs/Russian Songs/French Songs/Irish Folk Songs/English & American/Art Songs & Ballads/Etc."

Most entries of "SRB" in column 5 show corresponding entries in column 1, but for those that do not, a "SRB" entry seems to be a strong indication that McCormack regarded a selection as "active."

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A note about the sample:

The continuing accretion of recital program brochures and reviews over the last 2 years or more and the latter day discoveries therein of new (and until then undocumented) information about McCormack's performance of various songs or arias has reinforced the conviction that there are still lacunae that will be eventually filled. A recent example illustrates this process: The editor's research archive* for McCormack's repertoire and chronology fills many large 3-ring binders that occupy more than two feet of shelf space, and it is comprised of several thousand pages of notes, recital

brochures, and reviews covering the years from 1904-1945. It is the basis for the chronology and repertoire index in this book, which had achieved about 99% of their present form during the 18 months or so preceding plans for publication. At that point the editor's acquisition of a brochure for McCormack's recital on 11-29-17 in Atlanta revealed for the first time the performance in recital of the recitative and aria from Mehul's Joseph, "Vainement Pharaon ... Champs paternels." McCormack's Victor recording of this piece had been made the month before, but the selection was not known to have been performed in recital until the brochure in question turned up. There are doubtless many other such discoveries waiting to be made.

As for all "works in progress" there comes a point where the weary researcher must simply pause in his researching and present the results of his efforts to date, with the hope that it will serve as a helpful foundation for continuing research by his successors (if any) or grist for the musicological mill. This Repertoire Index of John McCormack represents the editor's surcease, as he moves on to other tasks long delayed, aware and lately reminded that the Horseman will not pass by.

PW